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MEMOIR
OF
ROBERT HENRY JENKINS

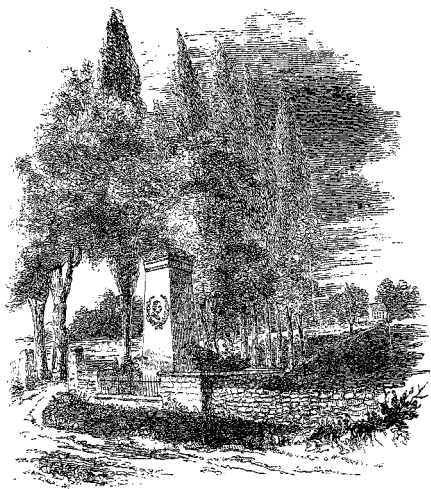
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BRIEF MEMORIAL.

MEMOIR

OF

ROBERT HENRY HUNKINS.

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MEMOIR
OF
ROBERT HENRY HUNKINS.

ROBERT HENRY HUNKINS, a member of the Old South Sabbath School, in Boston, in a class of which Mr. Barzillai M. Howe was the teacher, died on the 12th of January, 1859, in the evening of the day on which he was *nine* years of age, having been born on the 12th of January, 1850. Previously to this, his parents had been called to mourn for their first-born

child, whose name he bore. He began to talk at a very early age, and always showed a deep interest in things of a religious nature.

It is not my wish in this affectionate tribute to his memory, to say, or to intimate, that he had no faults. Even a pagan poet has said that "no one is born without faults, and he is best who is troubled by the least in number." Perhaps some of his classmates in the Sabbath school, and his dear parents at home have noticed sometimes what they deemed to be faults in his character and conduct.

Neither is it my wish in what I shall write respecting him and his short life,—to minister to any thing like a morbid and mistaken idea that Robert

was so greatly superior to all other children of his own age, that none now living, and some of them possibly members of the same school, can be reasonably compared with him for excellence of character, and quickness and intelligence of mind. I do not think his parents desire to indulge in any weak and too partial admiration of him, as a child so very uncommon, that few, if any other children can be supposed to equal or even surpass him. They both feel and think with Christian modesty of their dear departed son, the last and only remaining child of three, whom it has pleased God to remove from them by death in their earliest life. And it would be very unchristian in me, or

in any one, to try and persuade them or others, by any too partial and exaggerated representations, that Robert was such a prodigy, as to make it necessary to give this notice of his life and death in such terms of eulogy, as to represent him any better or more remarkable than he really was. I shall try to represent his character and life just as they appeared to me, and to those who knew him best.

It is certainly the case that his early quickness and maturity of intelligence often alarmed his mother,—she even wept in secret places, when she could not but notice, with others, some of the undeniable evidences he gave of an intelligence, and also a clearness and

depth of religious and moral thought, beyond his years. So deeply, indeed, was she impressed, in the earliest part of his life, that there might be a diseased prematurity in her son, that she tried to keep him back in his efforts to learn, lest she might too greatly encourage and stimulate him in what seemed to be unnatural, and therefore dangerous in his constitution of mind and body.

And yet, notwithstanding these affectionate and prudent efforts to restrain and not stimulate him, it is a fact that he learned his letters soon after he was two years of age, by asking the names of the large ones he saw on the signs in the streets, and by the time he was three years

old, he could read so that those who were accustomed to the imperfect pronunciation and emphasis of such early years, could easily understand him.

When, however, we have thus carefully and candidly noticed these several points, and tried to be strictly faithful in noting all the modifications in our views of Robert's character which they seem to require, we are constrained to say that there was in him a clearness and maturity of Christian character, and a brightness and quickness of intelligence, which make it not only proper, but a duty, to honor Christ, the Saviour, in whom he trusted in life and death, by making them known to others in this notice of them; and especially by present-

ing them to the superintendent, and teachers, and pupils, in the Sabbath school, to most of whom he has been somewhat known, and to all of whom, as well as to those who without being immediately connected with the school, are members of this church or society, it will be profitable to contemplate his short, but interesting and instructive life, and his early death.

Robert was remarkably intelligent in his *looks*. He had a bright, black and intelligent eye. His head was well formed, and indicative of a quick and active intellect. His manner of speaking impressed any one who listened to him, with the conviction that he had very clear perceptions of outward objects, and as clear ideas

of the thoughts awakened in his mind, and the knowledge stored in his memory.

That memory was uncommonly active and retentive. Whatever he saw, or heard, or read, he was not likely to forget. I remember that one of the first events which awakened my own attention and interest in him, and that of other persons who were present, in a special manner, was, the striking correctness, both of word and emphasis, with which he repeated in rhyme the names of the various books of the Old Testament, in one of our annual meetings of the mothers and children of the Maternal Association, connected with our church. The piece to which I allude is printed

in a little Sabbath school book published by the American Tract Society, New York, and entitled, "Songs for the Little Ones at Home." It will give us some idea of the interest it was suited to excite, when well and correctly repeated by quite a young boy, then, only three years and four months old, to record it here:—

"The great Jehovah speaks to us
In Genesis and Exodus;
Leviticus and Numbers see,
Followed by Deuteronomy.
Joshua and Judges sway the land,
Ruth gleans a sheaf with trembling hand;
Samuel and numerous Kings appear,
Whose Chronicles we wondering hear.
Ezra and Nehemiah now,
Esther, the beauteous mourner, show.
Job speaks in sighs, David in Psalms,
The Proverbs teach to scatter alms.

Ecclesiastes then comes on,
And the sweet Song of Solomon.
Isaiah, Jeremiah then
With Lamentations takes his pen.
Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea's lyres
Swell Joel, Amos, Obadiah's.
Next Jonah, Micah, Nahum come,
And lofty Habakkuk finds room.
While Zephaniah, Haggai calls,
Rapt Zechariah builds his walls;
And Malachi, with garments rent,
Concludes the Ancient Testament."

Some, if not many of those who were then present, will remember also, so soon as I refer to it, the great correctness, both of pronunciation and emphasis, and the interest of manner, too, with which he came forward at the last Sabbath school concert he ever attended, on the second Sabbath evening of December, the last month

of the last year, after the superintendent had intimated that he supposed none of the children had been prepared for such an exercise, and led on the others who followed him, and repeated from the Bible the eighty-fourth Psalm. There is a passage in that Psalm which, since his death, I have always thought of in connection with his afflicted father and mother. It is that which begins with the fifth verse, and ends with the seventh: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways of them; who, passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before

God." The meaning is, blessed are they, who in passing through the trials and afflictions of this life, make them the occasions of increasing their love to God, and their desire to resort submissively and confidingly to Him in the services of His sanctuary; drawing comfort from Him there, as from wells of salvation, filled by the rains of his grace. Just as the people described by the Psalmist, as they passed through the void and desolate region, called Baca, as they journeyed towards Jerusalem, made wells in the wilderness, which, filled by the rains of heaven, quenched their thirst, and sustained their vigor in their going towards Zion. So may his parents derive their strength from

God, amid the afflictions through which He has been leading them !

Equally interesting, too, and almost prophetic of his quickly coming death, were the last words of a hymn which Robert repeated at the close of his recital from the Bible on that occasion :—

“ Oh, may I bear some humble part,
In that immortal song,—
Wonder and joy shall tune my heart,
And love command my tongue.”

Thus far, I have alluded only in general terms, both to the intelligence and piety of Robert. It is my wish now to present, as briefly as possible, some of the facts in his short life, by which what I have said, or

alluded to, will be seen to be justified. And in doing this, it will be well, for the sake of clearness of statement, to attend first to his *intellectual* qualities, and afterwards to his *religious* character.

His teacher in the Quincy school, Miss Page, has authorized me to say that he was decidedly the first scholar in his class. She states that in acquiring and reciting his lessons, he was remarkable for entering with his whole heart and mind into the subject, and never recited the mere words only, but understood the subject well. She assures me that he was not only respected, but *beloved* by his school-fellows; and this was the more remarkable, because he was in his

habits somewhat secluded from them, and in the time of their daily recess usually remained apart from them at his place in the school-room, engaged in study or meditation. And yet she affirms that there was nothing in these his habits, which seemed affected or assumed for the sake of appearances. His school-fellows looked upon him as sincere and simple-hearted, and therefore they loved, as well as respected him. He seemed to his teacher to be habitually thinking, either on his studies, or on subjects of a moral or intellectual kind, so that if she suddenly called his attention to any of the little acts or objects of the school-room, there would be discovered for a time a remarkable absence of

mind, so far as these things are concerned, which he himself would regret, but which was dissipated at the moment in which he was spoken to respecting any of his studies, or any of those higher and serious themes on which he loved to meditate.

His acquisitions and his reading were decidedly beyond his years. A somewhat amusing illustration of this occurred in one of the little domestic incidents of his life.

When he was between three and four years old, an acquaintance from the country coming to visit his parents, instructed her little boy to buy him a pretty book to amuse him. The book was bought and presented him. It was "Mother Goose's Melodies."

He, of course, received it kindly, and tried to be pleased with it, and so far as possible profit by the reading it afforded. But little Robert had not yet arrived at that period of life, when even a learned and aged person may read "Mother Goose" with pleasure, on account of its historical connections with past times, and the subtle inferences of wisdom which may possibly be drawn from it: and it was evidently hard work for him to elevate it to the position which his heart prompted him to do, for the sake of feeling a proper gratitude to the friend who gave it. At last, "the day after their departure," he took it up, and after having looked at it some time, he cast it down on the floor,

saying, "I should think that C—— would know better than to buy such a silly book as that."

But it is his *religious* character which it is most appropriate and important I should try to present to you here. And here, I must say in candor, that when I first began to notice it, there was occasionally such an old way, I may call it, of expressing himself, that knowing that he had a good father and mother, and that the mother particularly,—as what tender and pious mother does not,—felt and expressed a deep interest in the highest religious welfare of her child, I felt a little fearful that his words might have been caught up from the speech of older persons, and were used by him

without a sufficiently deep conviction and feeling of their meaning. But a longer and a better acquaintance with him would not allow any one to come to such a conclusion. If he did sometimes speak in what we may call an old way, he meant what he said, and he felt the power of its meaning.

He once said to me, as we were leaving our house of worship on the Lord's day, "I want to come and see you and talk about my soul." And, after he had come, there was nothing in his modes of expression, which was not natural and wholly unaffected, developing an intelligent and religious thoughtfulness on things unseen and eternal.

So, when I first visited him in his

last sickness, he turned, and said with great clearness and earnestness, "Dr. B., I am going to die—I want to die!" A stranger might have supposed that even these words, spoken in such solemn circumstances, and by so young a child, might not have come from a sufficiently deep conviction of all that is implied in dying. But the more one conversed with him, the more entire would be the persuasion that Robert did feel the import of these words, and did enter, and with the heart too, into many of the sublime and solemn truths, connected in a Christian's mind, with the act of dying. I cannot better illustrate this, than by quoting to you here some facts respecting his

last hours, written down at my request, by his dear mother.

“One night during the early part of his illness, he awoke from sleep and said, ‘How sweet it is, mother, to have Jesus with us.’ I then said, ‘Do you feel that He is near you at this time?’ ‘Oh yes, he is with me all the time!’”

At another time he called me to the bed-side, and told me he had been thinking of the words, “Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.” “So it is with me; the doctor can give me the medicine, and you can take care of me, but unless God give his blessing, I shall not get well.”

He expressed no desire for his life

to be prolonged, except that he might be the means of doing good to others. During the moments of bodily distress he would look up and say, "Can't you relieve this agony? Oh, this agony!" On being told that I would willingly take his suffering and bear it for him, if God would permit, he would then say, "Will you pray?" The voice of prayer, which ever was sweet to him in the hours of health, was peculiarly soothing at such times. While his soul joined in these petitions, the distress of his mortal frame subsided.

On Sabbath morning, December 26, he repeated these lines:—

"Thine earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love,
But there's a nobler rest above;

To that my longing soul aspires,
With ardent hope and warm desires."

At four o'clock he looked up, and saw me standing at the bed-side, and said, "Perhaps I may spend next Sabbath with Jesus in heaven. How sweet it would be!" I then said, "How do you feel when you think of dying?" He looked at me, while a sweet smile overspread his countenance, never to be forgotten, and said, "Why, mother, I feel that Jesus is here, close by me, waiting to go down the dark valley." After a few moments, I attempted to repeat those touching lines:—

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are,—"

but my voice faltering, he immediately finished the verse, and then added, "Yes, mother, and he can make my bed soft too."

On another occasion, after having disposed of some books, and spoken of absent friends, he said with sweet composure, "I know the spot where I shall be laid, at the side of brother Albert." I then said, "Is there not a gloomy feeling, when you think that this dear body must be put in the cold grave?" He answered with great emphasis, "I shan't be there. Oh, dear mother, when you go out to the cemetery, don't weep over my grave, for you know I shan't be there." If he saw me weeping, he would say, "Oh, it grieves my heart so, to see

you weep when I am going to be so happy."

His greatest desire for all who visited him during his sickness, was, that they might prepare to meet him in heaven. He loved the Sabbath school of which he was a member. Many times did he say to me, when speaking of it, "I hope I shall meet them all in heaven."

He loved the cause of Foreign Missions. He had a great desire to become a Foreign Missionary, that he might teach the heathen about the Saviour. All his plans were laid for the future, in regard to this one great object of his life. The day before his death he said, "You know it was my aim to be a missionary, if I had lived,

but God is going to take me home to Him; I want to have you give all my money to Deacon S., for him to send to the heathen." Since his death this has been done. It amounted to \$20.10. This he had accumulated by depositing \$10 in the Savings Bank, which with interest, and \$5 he had since saved, but not deposited, amounted to this sum; and before his death he was accustomed to give a dollar a year to the cause. He had been presented with the Memoir of David T. Stoddard, just before his sickness. On giving it to me, he alluded to the fact that he had read but three chapters in it. "Well," said he, "I shall soon be with him, and then I

shall know more about him than if I lived, and read the book."

A few weeks before his illness, after reading aloud to me in the Bible, he sat in deep thought for some moments. I asked him what he was thinking about. He answered thus:—"Oh, I was thinking when we get to heaven God will show us things that the angels don't understand." He very often comforted himself with the thought, that those hard passages in the Word of God would all become clear to his mind, when he went to heaven to live.

He had a great love for the Sabbath. Often would he say, on Saturday evening, "How happy it makes me to think tomorrow is Sunday.

How should we live without it? I wish every body loved the Sabbath day," and other similar expressions.

The Bible was his favorite book. At the age of three years he began to learn chapters from this blessed volume. The last chapter of Malachi was the first he committed to memory. His heart became deeply interested in the story of Jesus, his life, death and ascension to heaven, as I would relate it to him in childlike language, before he was two years old. When we were alone, how often he would say, "Now, mamma, do tell me all about Jesus?"

From the earliest dawn of childhood he was accustomed to make known his requests to God by prayer. On one occasion, while I was sitting

in the room engaged in sewing, where he was playing with a train of cars, he arose from the floor and came to me, saying, "Mamma, I do want you to live as long as I do, and take care of me." There were tears in his eyes as he said this. I was much overcome, and clasping him in my arms, we sat in silence some moments. He then went from my lap to the side of the bed, and said, "I will ask God to let you live, mamma." He then kneeled down, folded his little hands, and offered a short, but fervent prayer to this effect. This was soon after he was three years old. At two years he began to kneel with me at the bed-side, to pour out his little heart in prayer to his Father in heaven,

Never from that time was he known to go to his rest at night without prayer, excepting once. On this occasion, I was unavoidably detained from him until he had been put to bed for the night. After retiring to rest, I was awakened by sobs and crying. "What is the matter, dear? are you sick?" said I. "No, no, mamma, do let me get up and pray! I haven't prayed; I am afraid God won't take care of me till morning." He was very much grieved, and I took him from the bed, and wrapped him up warmly. He kneeled down in the usual spot, and after pouring out his little desires to God, laid down and slept sweetly until morning.

"These," says his mother, "are but

a very few of the recollections of his early life. With others, I may acquaint you at some future time, if necessary."

And to these reminiscences from that affectionate and faithful mother, let me now add the short memorial received from his Sabbath school teacher:—

"Robert Henry Hunkins entered the Old South Sabbath School in March, 1856. He was only twice late during the time he was in my class; always had his lessons correct; was attentive, and appeared *devoted*, as well as desirous to learn."

I have spoken of his remarkably correct knowledge of the Bible. This will be in some degree shown by my

reading to you part of a short sermon he wrote, but a little time before his death, from the text in Amos 4: 12.

“Prepare to meet thy God.”

First,—this means that we must become Christians before we die; not wait until the last moment of our life arrives. Then it will be too late. God requires us to seek the Lord early, while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Will an individual save himself, who has passed his life in infidelity, and reading infidel books, by merely crying out on his death-bed, God save me? No, he does not do it because he is sorry for his past sins, and wishes to be forgiven, but because he begins to be afraid that there is a heaven or hell, and he shall go to hell.

Secondly,—it means we must prepare while we are young. Those that seek me early shall find me. Seek the Lord while

he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Resist the devil and he will flee from us. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, when the evil days come not, nor the days draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. How pleasing it must be to Christian parents, to see their children brought up to be ministers, to see them admitted into the church, and when they grow older, to see and hear them preach the gospel. No doubt, but what it reminds them of the words of Luke, and they were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.

Thirdly, we must put our trust in God, not in man. Thus saith the Lord, cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord, for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Hoshea relied

on So, King of Egypt, but it did him no good, for Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, carried him captive with his people into Assyria. Zedekiah, King of Judah, called Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to his help, but he was driven into his own lands; and Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, besieged Jerusalem, and took it, and burnt it with fire, and carried Zedekiah with his people captive. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. Abijah, King of Judah, trusted in God when Jeroboam, King of Israel, was encamped against him with twice as large an army as his own, and he succeeded. Asa, successor of Abijah, conquered by trusting in the Lord: but soon his heart waxed gross, and he put his trust in man. Jehoshaphat, his son, was delivered out of the hand of a large multitude by trusting in the Lord. Hezekiah, also, was delivered out of the hands of a large army. The lepers, and the centurion, and Peter's mother-in-law, the sick of the palsy, the diseased with an issue of blood,

and the lunatic, and the thief upon the cross, showed faith in Christ; and so ought we to put faith in Christ to forgive our sins. For we are all sinners, and there is none that doeth good, no, not one. And Christ alone can forgive our sins. Neither is there salvation in any other; and we must ask God to forgive our sins with a feeling that he will forgive them, because Christ died for us and has promised to forgive us. Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. He does not say may or can, but shall. Oh, blessed promise!

Fourthly, we must resist temptation. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God,

that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Christ overcame the devil and he departed. Joseph also overcame the temptations of Potiphar's wife. So ought we to overcome evil, for Satan comes and tempts us. When tempted to do any wrong action, we should say, as Hagar, "Thou, God, seest me."

Fifthly, we must be Christians in every sense of the word. We must go to church, keep the Sabbath holy, feed the hungry, clothe the poor, converse with people about their souls, bring children into the Sabbath school. But above all things, we must have faith in God, for without faith it is impossible to please God. We can go out

into some dirty lane in the city, and find a little boy clothed in rags, and bring him to the Sabbath school, and that little boy may grow up and become a useful man; and we can put money in the contribution box, and a great many other things which I have not mentioned.

Finally, we must prepare to meet our God; if we do not, we shall be among the number to whom the Judge shall say at the last day, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger and ye took me not in; naked and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." Then shall they also answer him, saying, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" Then shall he answer them, saying, "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

And so this interesting boy has gone to join the great multitude of the dead:—

"The innumerable caravan that moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death."

But as he said to his mother, when she asked him, "Is there not a gloomy feeling, when you think that this dear body must be put in the cold, cold grave?" "I shan't be there! Oh, dear mother, when you go out to the cemetery, don't weep over my grave, for you know I shan't be there;" so we believe he is not there; his spirit

has gone to be with Christ, which is far better.

* One of the strongest evidences of the life of the soul, though the body dies, aside from the direct declarations of Christ, who "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light," is seen in this its power to speak of the death of the body it inhabits, and contemplate before it departs the very spot where that body shall lie!

But he has gone to be with Christ. And I leave the history of his short life and early death, praying that it may be blessed to the spiritual and eternal good of the children of our Sabbath school, and to the good of all of us.

His mother has said that the last chapter in Malachi was the first one in the Bible Robert ever committed to memory, and I think she has also told me that it was always a very pleasing chapter to him, ever since he learned it. The last verse in that chapter, and of course the last verse of the Old Testament, is a remarkable one, as showing the way in which God designs to bless this world, and save it from his judgments. It is by making parents faithful to their children, and causing children to obey their parents in the Lord. And it reads as follows: may it comfort, as I repeat it, the hearts of Robert's parents, as they hope that Christ has enabled them to be in some measure faithful to their

child, and him to be in some measure dutiful to them. "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

Robert Henry was buried in Forest-hill Cemetery, on Spruce Avenue, in the lot marked 1260.



18 July 1860.

